

Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986

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U.S. Code, Title 10, Subtitle A, Part I, Chapter 5

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151. Joint Chiefs of Staff: Composition; Functions

(a) Composition. There are in the Department of Defense the Joint Chiefs of Staff, headed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consist of the following:

- (1) [The Chairman.](#)
- (2) [The Vice Chairman.](#)
- (3) [The Chief of Staff of the Army.](#)
- (4) [The Chief of Naval Operations.](#)
- (5) [The Chief of Staff of the Air Force.](#)
- (6) [The Commandant of the Marine Corps.](#)

(b) Function as Military Advisers.

(1) The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.

(2) The other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are military advisers to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense as specified in subsections (d) and (e).

(c) Consultation by Chairman.

(1) In carrying out his functions, duties, and responsibilities, the Chairman shall, as he considers appropriate, consult with and seek the advice of

(A) the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and

(B) the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands.

(2) Subject to subsection (d), in presenting advice with respect to any matter to the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman shall, as he considers appropriate, inform the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense, as the case may be, of the range of military advice and opinion with respect to that matter.

(d) Advice and Opinions of Members Other Than Chairman.

(1) A member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (other than the Chairman) may submit to the Chairman advice or an opinion in disagreement with, or advice or an opinion in addition to, the advice presented by the Chairman to the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense. If a member submits such advice or opinion, the Chairman shall present the advice or opinion of such member at the same time he presents his own advice to the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense, as the case may be.

(2) The Chairman shall establish procedures to ensure that the presentation of his own advice to the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense is not unduly delayed by reason of the submission of the individual advice or opinion of another member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

(e) Advice on Request.

The members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, individually or collectively, in their capacity as military advisers, shall provide advice to the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense on a particular matter when the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary requests such advice.

(f) Recommendations to Congress.

After first informing the Secretary of Defense, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff may make such recommendations to Congress relating to the Department of Defense as he considers appropriate.

(g) Meetings of JCS.

(1) The Chairman shall convene regular meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

(2) Subject to the authority, direction, and control of the President and the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman shall

(A) preside over the Joint Chiefs of Staff;

(B) provide agenda for the meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (including, as the Chairman considers appropriate, any subject for the agenda recommended by any other member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff);

(C) assist the Joint Chiefs of Staff in carrying on their business as promptly as practicable; and

(D) determine when issues under consideration by the Joint Chiefs of Staff shall be decided.

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152. Chairman: Appointment; Grade and Rank

(a) Appointment; Term of Office.

(1) There is a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, from the officers of the regular components of the armed forces. The Chairman serves at the pleasure of the President for a term of two years, beginning on October 1 of odd-numbered years. Subject to paragraph (3), an officer serving as Chairman may be reappointed in the same manner for two additional terms. However, in time of war there is no limit on the number of reappointments.

(2) In the event of the death, retirement, resignation, or reassignment of the officer serving as Chairman before the end of the term for which the officer was appointed, an officer appointed to fill the vacancy shall serve as Chairman only for the remainder of the original term, but may be reappointed as provided in paragraph (1).

(3) An officer may not serve as Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff if the combined period of service of such officer in such positions exceeds six years. However, the President may extend to eight years the combined period of service an officer may serve in such positions if he determines such action is in the national interest. The limitations of this paragraph do not apply in time of war.

(b) Requirement for Appointment.

(1) The President may appoint an officer as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff only if the officer has served as

(A) the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff;

(B) the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, or the Commandant of the Marine Corps;
or

(C) the commander of a unified or specified combatant command.

(2) The President may waive paragraph (1) in the case of an officer if the President determines such action is necessary in the national interest.

(c) Grade and Rank. The Chairman, while so serving, holds the grade of general or, in the case of an officer of the Navy, admiral and outranks all other officers of the armed forces. However, he may not exercise military command over the Joint Chiefs of Staff or any of the armed forces.

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153. Chairman: Functions

(a) Planning; Advice; Policy Formulation. Subject to the authority, direction, and control of the President and the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff shall be responsible for the following:

(1) Strategic Direction. Assisting the President and the Secretary of Defense in providing for the strategic direction of the armed forces.

(2) Strategic Planning.

(A) Preparing strategic plans, including plans which conform with resource levels projected by the Secretary of Defense to be available for the period of time for which the plans are to be effective.

(B) Preparing joint logistic and mobility plans to support those strategic plans and recommending the assignment of logistic and mobility responsibilities to the armed forces in accordance with those logistic and mobility plans.

(C) Performing net assessments to determine the capabilities of the armed forces of the United States and its allies as compared with those of their potential adversaries.

(3) Contingency Planning; Preparedness.

(A) Providing for the preparation and review of contingency plans which conform to policy guidance from the President and the Secretary of Defense.

(B) Preparing joint logistic and mobility plans to support those contingency plans and recommending the assignment of logistic and mobility responsibilities to the armed forces in accordance with those logistic and mobility plans.

(C) Advising the Secretary on critical deficiencies and strengths in force capabilities (including manpower, logistic, and mobility support) identified during the preparation and review of contingency plans and assessing the effect of such deficiencies and strengths on meeting national security objectives and policy and on strategic plans.

(D) Establishing and maintaining, after consultation with the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands, a uniform system of evaluating the preparedness of each such command to carry out missions assigned to the command.

(4) Advice on Requirements, Programs, and Budget.

(A) Advising the Secretary, under section 163(b)(2) of this title, on the priorities of the requirements identified by the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands.

(B) Advising the Secretary on the extent to which the program recommendations and budget proposals of the military departments and other components of the Department of Defense for a fiscal year conform with the priorities established in strategic plans and with the priorities established for the requirements of the unified and specified combatant commands.

(C) Submitting to the Secretary alternative program recommendations and budget proposals, within projected resource levels and guidance provided by the Secretary, in order to achieve greater conformance with the priorities referred to in clause (B).

(D) Recommending to the Secretary, in accordance with section 166 of this title, a budget proposal for activities of each unified and specified combatant command.

(E) Advising the Secretary on the extent to which the major programs and policies of the armed forces in the area of manpower conform with strategic plans.

(F) Assessing military requirements for defense acquisition programs.

(5) Doctrine, Training, and Education.

(A) Developing doctrine for the joint employment of the armed forces.

(B) Formulating policies for the joint training of the armed forces.

(C) Formulating policies for coordinating the military education and training of members of the armed forces.

(6) Other Matters.

(A) Providing for representation of the United States on the Military Staff Committee of the United Nations in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

(B) Performing such other duties as may be prescribed by law or by the President or the Secretary of Defense.

(b) Report on Assignment of Roles and Missions.

(1) Not less than once every three years, or upon the request of the President or the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman shall submit to the Secretary of Defense a report containing such recommendations for changes in the assignment of functions (or roles and missions) to the armed forces as the Chairman considers necessary to achieve maximum effectiveness of the armed forces. In preparing each such report, the Chairman shall consider (among other matters) the following:

(A) Changes in the nature of the threats faced by the United States.

(B) Unnecessary duplication of effort among the armed forces.

(C) Changes in technology that can be applied effectively to warfare.

(2) The Chairman shall include in each such report recommendations for such changes in policies, directives, regulations, and legislation as may be necessary to achieve the changes in the assignment of functions recommended by the Chairman.

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154. Vice Chairman

(a) Appointment.

(1) There is a Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, from the officers of the regular components of the armed forces.

(2) The Chairman and Vice Chairman may not be members of the same armed force. However, the President may waive the restriction in the preceding sentence for a limited period of time in order to provide for the

orderly transition of officers appointed to serve in the positions of Chairman and Vice Chairman.

(3) The Vice Chairman serves at the pleasure of the President for a term of two years and may be reappointed in the same manner for two additional terms. However, in time of war there is no limit on the number of reappointments.

(b) Requirement for Appointment.

(1) The President may appoint an officer as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff only if the officer

(A) has the joint specialty under section 661 of this title; and

(B) has completed a full tour of duty in a joint duty assignment (as defined in section 664(f) of this title) as a general or flag officer.

(2) The President may waive paragraph (1) in the case of an officer if the President determines such action is necessary in the national interest.

(c) **Duties.** The Vice Chairman performs the duties prescribed for him as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and such other duties as may be prescribed by the Chairman with the approval of the Secretary of Defense.

(d) **Function as Acting Chairman.** When there is a vacancy in the office of Chairman or in the absence or disability of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman acts as Chairman and performs the duties of the Chairman until a successor is appointed or the absence or disability ceases.

(e) **Succession After Chairman and Vice Chairman.** When there is a vacancy in the offices of both Chairman and Vice Chairman or in the absence or disability of both the Chairman and the Vice Chairman, or when there is a vacancy in one such office and in the absence or disability of the officer holding the other, the President shall designate a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to act as and perform the duties of the Chairman until a successor to the Chairman or Vice Chairman is appointed or the absence or disability of the Chairman or Vice Chairman ceases.

(f) **Grade and Rank.** The Vice Chairman, while so serving, holds the grade of general or, in the case of an officer of the Navy, admiral and outranks all other officers of the armed forces except the Chairman. The Vice Chairman may not exercise military command over the Joint Chiefs of Staff or any of the armed forces.

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155. Joint Staff

(a) **Appointment of Officers to Joint Staff.**

(1) There is a Joint Staff under the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Staff assists the Chairman and, subject to the authority, direction, and control of the Chairman, the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in carrying out their responsibilities.

(2) Officers of the armed forces (other than the Coast Guard) assigned to serve on the Joint Staff shall be selected by the Chairman in approximately equal numbers from

(A) the Army;

(B) the Navy and the Marine Corps; and

(C) the Air Force.

(3) Selection of officers of an armed force to serve on the Joint Staff shall be made by the Chairman from a list of officers submitted by the Secretary of the military department having jurisdiction over that armed force. Each officer whose name is submitted shall be among those officers considered to be the most outstanding officers of that armed force. The Chairman may specify the number of officers to be included on any such list.

(b) **Director.** The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, after consultation with the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and with the approval of the Secretary of Defense, may select an officer to serve as Director of the Joint Staff.

(c) **Management of Joint Staff.** The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff manages the Joint Staff and the Director of the Joint Staff. The Joint Staff shall perform such duties as the Chairman prescribes and shall perform such duties under such procedures as the Chairman prescribes.

(d) **Operation of Joint Staff.** The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that the Joint Staff is independently organized and operated so that the Joint Staff supports the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in meeting the congressional purpose set forth in the last clause of section 2 of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 401) to provide:

(1) for the unified strategic direction of the combatant forces;

(2) for their operation under unified command; and (3) for their integration into an efficient team of land, naval, and air forces.

(e) Prohibition of Function as Armed Forces General Staff. The Joint Staff shall not operate or be organized as an overall Armed Forces General Staff and shall have no executive authority. The Joint Staff may be organized and may operate along conventional staff lines.

(f) Tour of Duty of Joint Staff Officers.

(1) An officer who is assigned or detailed to permanent duty on the Joint Staff may not serve for a tour of duty of more than four years. However, such a tour of duty may be extended with the approval of the Secretary of Defense.

(2) In accordance with procedures established by the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff may suspend from duty and recommend the reassignment of any officer assigned to the Joint Staff. Upon receipt of such a recommendation, the Secretary concerned shall promptly reassign the officer.

(3) An officer completing a tour of duty with the Joint Staff may not be assigned or detailed to permanent duty on the Joint Staff within two years after relief from that duty except with the approval of the Secretary.

(4) Paragraphs (1) and (3) do not apply

(A) in time of war; or

(B) during a national emergency declared by the President or Congress.

(g) Composition of Joint Staff.

(1) The Joint Staff is composed of all members of the armed forces and civilian employees assigned or detailed to permanent duty in the executive part of the Department of Defense to perform the functions and duties prescribed under subsections (a) and (c).

(2) The Joint Staff does not include members of the armed forces or civilian employees assigned or detailed to permanent duty in a military department.